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INFO RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 3278
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1902

UNCLAS PRAGUE 001080

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CODEL TAUSCHER DISPELS MYTHS ON MISSILE DEFENSE DURING
PRAGUE VISIT

11. (U) Summary: CODEL Tauscher delivered a clear and effective message to Czech politicians and the public about Congressional views on the planned U.S. missile defense (MD) radar. The visit helped dispel a number of persistent myths by making clear that there is bipartisan Congressional support for the Polish interceptors as well as the Czech radar, that MD has strong support among Democrats, and that NATO is seen as a critical element of any future MD system. This message was well received by both government supporters of MD and skeptics. End summary.

12. (U) CODEL Tauscher visited Prague September 14-15, the final stop after Brussels and Warsaw on a trip devoted to missile defense. The CODEL was led by Ellen Tauscher, Chairman of the HASC Strategic Forces Subcommittee, and included subcommittee members Jim Cooper and Michael Turner. Deputy Assistance Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs Lisa Marie Cheney accompanied the CODEL, along with HASC Deputy Staff Director Bob DeGrasse and HASC Professional Staff Members Frank Rose and Kari Bingen Tytler. In Prague the CODEL met with PM Mirek Topolaneck, Deputy PM Sasha Vondra, Deputy FM Tomas Pojar, Social Democratic (CSSD) Party Chairman Jiri Paroubek, and several Members of Parliament including Jan Hamacek, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Ondrej Liska, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee. The CODEL gave a press conference and also addressed the press with the Prime Minister and Deputy PM.

CODEL'S MESSAGE

13. (SBU) Chairman Tauscher gave a consistent message in both private meetings and public statements. The main themes were:

- Bipartisan: missile defense has strong bipartisan support in the Congress, and this includes the European (or "third") site in the Czech Republic and Poland; all the leading contenders for President in 2008 support MD, so there is no reason to delay progress on the European site until after the election
- Budget: the cuts to the administration's FY2008 funding request for the European site are the direct result of increased Congressional oversight of MD spending and should not be interpreted as a Congressional effort to slow or kill the European site; since negotiations will continue with both Poland and the Czech Republic during much of FY2008, it was a prudent step to allocate funding to other priorities; however, the Congress has made clear that once agreements with the two countries are signed and ratified, the Secretary of Defense can ask for funds to be reprogrammed

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-- NATO: the European site should be "NATO-ized" as quickly as possible and become one piece of a "system of systems" that provides comprehensive coverage to all NATO allies from a range of existing and emerging missile threats (put differently, the U.S. system in the Czech Republic and Poland needs to be "bolted on" to the NATO system of systems); NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer is accelerating work towards this goal, but it is the responsibility of all member states to work towards this goal, and notably to achieve a strong result at the spring Bucharest Summit

-- Threat: our immediate effort needs to be protection of Europe's southern flank from the existing threat of short- and medium-range missiles from Iran; mobile systems provide the best defense; but at the same time we need to move ahead quickly to prepare for defenses against the emerging threat from medium- to long-range weapons (i.e., the European site in the Czech Republic and Poland); we need to work with all NATO partners, and particularly the French, to convince skeptics that the threat is real, and ideally to declassify threat information

-- Single system: the radar planned for the Czech Republic and the fixed interceptors in Poland form a single system and are "indivisible"

-- Politics: in meetings with opposition politicians, Chairman Tauscher urged them to not play politics with national security issues and to pay attention to the threat; she repeatedly expressed her readiness to work closely with the Czech government and opposition figures to help win support for the MD initiative, including during CSSD Chairman Paroubek's planned fall trip to the United States. She directly asked for Paroubek's support for MD.

PRIME MINISTER& DEPUTY PM

14. (SBU) Both Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek and Deputy PM Sasha Vondra expressed strong government support for MD. They highlighted the divided domestic political scene, but both expressed certainty that negotiations would reach a positive conclusion. They noted the importance of the messages CODEL Tauscher brought to Prague in terms of minimizing local opposition, and both arranged press conferences after their meeting to showcase the CODEL's themes. Topolanek and Vondra both stressed that the hosting of U.S. MD assets is in the Czechs' national interest, and made reference to the unstable geo-political situation (i.e., a resurgent Russia) to bolster their case. While both stressed that they are not putting any conditions on accepting the radar, they expressed their hope that the radar would spur new high-tech investments, supporting a government focus on increasing research and development; they asked for any support in this direction that the Congress could provide.

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER

15. (SBU) Deputy FM Tomas Pojar, the lead Czech negotiator on the MD Agreement, echoed many of Topolanek's points. In terms of the negotiations, he explained there are "many months of very hard work ahead," especially on the SOFA Supplemental, but expressed confidence that agreements will be reached. Expanding on government thinking as to why the MD facility is important, Pojar offered three reasons: first, as a continuation of the historical ties between the U.S. and Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia (including support in the founding of the country and liberation after WWII); second, because of the reality of the emerging threat from the Middle East; third, because of the geo-political situation, including Russian attempts to exert influence in Central Europe. Expanding on the last point, Pojar outlined his fear that if MD does not become a central focus of NATO, the U.S. system will cover only North America, and this could lead eventually to a splintering of NATO, raising the specter of a U.S. withdrawal from the Alliance.

SKEPTICAL MPS

16. (SBU) CODEL Tauscher had separate meetings with CSSD Deputy Jan Hamacek, Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Green Deputy Ondrej Liska, Chair of the European Affairs Committee. Both are bright, young, first-time MPs who have been skeptics of the MD project to date. Both traveled to Washington earlier this year and returned to Prague concerned that the European project did not have strong Democratic support. In separate meetings, CODEL Tauscher was able to allay many of their concerns, specifically relating to domestic U.S. politics. Both are very concerned about NATO, and clearly appreciated the CODEL's strong and persuasive approach to "NATOizing" MD, and the clear statement that the Czech and Polish pieces of the European site are indivisible. Both expressed interest in continuing to work closely with Members of Congress in the months ahead.

OPPOSITION PARTY LEADER PAROUBEK

17. (SBU) CODEL Tauscher's meeting with CSSD Chairman Jiri Paroubek

came just hours after the leaders of Social Democratic parties from the Central European states issued a declaration in Prague stating their opposition to the U.S. MD project. Chairman Tauscher and other CODEL members noted their concern with this statement, which did not reflect any awareness of the threat. Noting that her message addresses many of the themes that Paroubek has previously identified as important to him and his party, Tauscher encouraged Paroubek not to play politics with national security matters and to look closely at the threat. As he has in previous meetings with American officials, Paroubek stated that he personally has no opposition to MD, but that he cannot take a more positive stance when over 80% of his party are opposed. He offered several openings however: he told CODEL (and the press) that he is prepared to change his position if convinced that the threat is not "virtual," he suggested that he could move the party in a different direction if only 65% of the party were opposed, and he promised to abide by any MD agreement that is ratified should he become prime minister in the future. Paroubek also explained the domestic context for his stance, notably the success he has had to date in reducing support for the Communist Party, a process that could be reversed if he were to take a more positive stance on MD. Paroubek said he hoped to see Chairman Tauscher during his planned autumn visit to the United States.

PRESS

18. (U) CODEL Tauscher received extensive press coverage in both broadcast and print media; the reporting was factual and extremely effective in advancing our public effort on MD. The CODEL's clear statements punctured many myths (that the Congress opposes the Polish interceptors, that Democrats oppose MD, that it is foolish to conclude agreements in advance of the 2008 elections) and made clear that NATO will be a centerpiece of U.S. engagement. The timing was especially good in relation to the Central European Social Democrats' declaration: Paroubek's comments after meeting with CODEL Tauscher were much more moderate than we would have expected after a major political meeting and tended to blunt the impact of the political declaration. The visit made a strong contribution to the Czech-U.S. effort to relaunch the public debate on MD.

GRABER